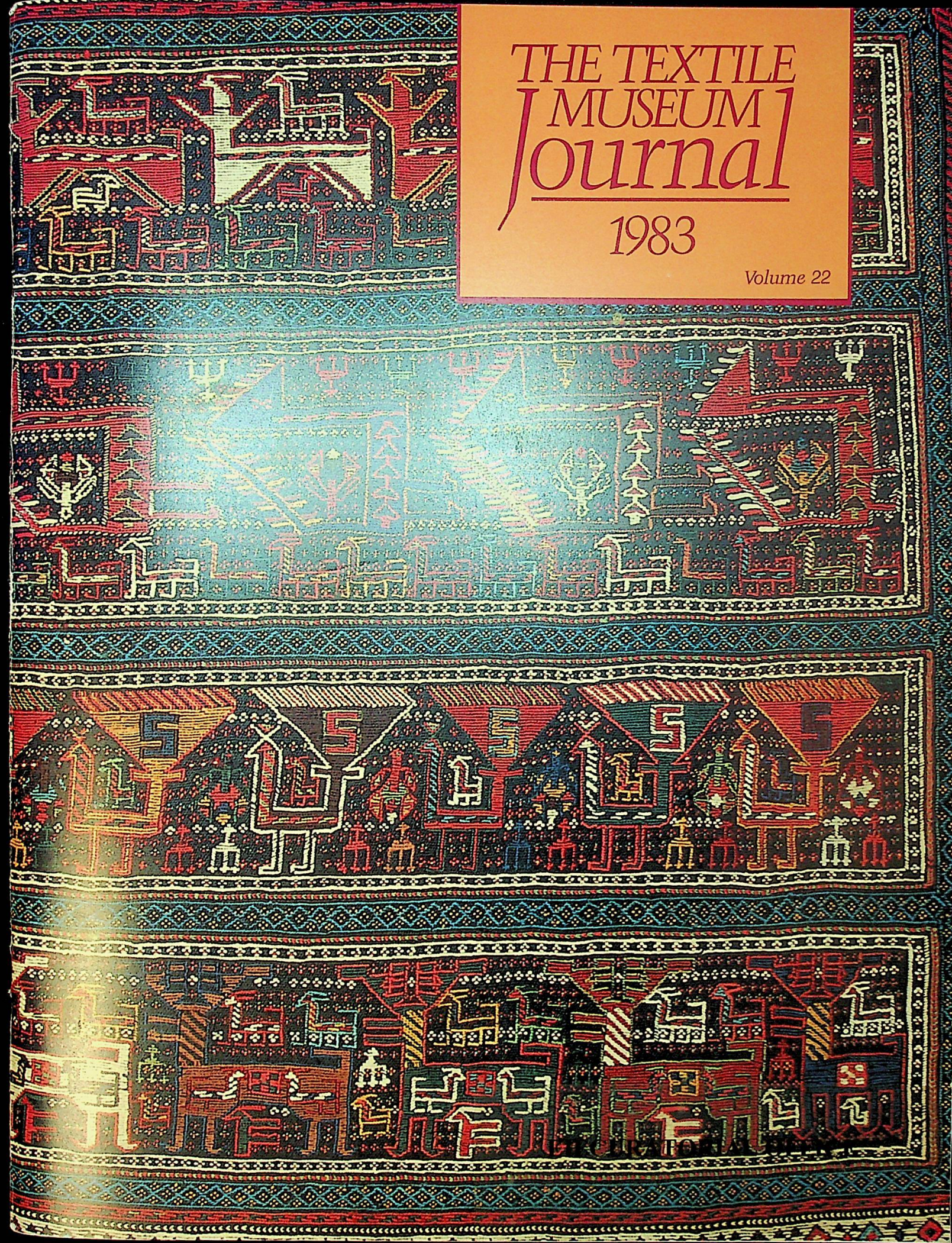


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Volume 22



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Cover: Detail of a South Persian horse blanket from the Fars area, probably Qashqai. Arthur D. Jenkins Collection

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Kesa: Its Sacred And Secular Aspects

ALAN KENNEDY

INTRODUCTION

KESA (PRONOUNCED KEH-SA) IS THE Japanese word for the principal type of garment worn by Buddhist monks. Much can be learned about both Buddhism and Far Eastern costume and textiles through the study of *kesa*.^{*} However, this subject has largely been ignored by Western scholars in both fields.¹ In Asia, *kesa* have been written about primarily as they related to the practice of Buddhism.² An exception is the work of Gafū Izutsu,³ however translated editions of his work and of most Buddhist literature on *kesa* has yet to be published.⁴

The neglect of this subject is not the result of a lack of extant examples. Numerous *kesa* are to be found in Japanese temples and museum collections, some dating to the 7th, 8th, and 9th centuries. These early examples are quite rare in costume and textile history for having survived more than a millennium in collections, rather than in an archaeological context. Outside of Japan, particularly in the United States, museums are rich in *kesa* collections.⁵

The purpose of this article is to discuss *kesa* as it relates to the religious aspects of Buddhism and to examine its history from the perspective of Far Eastern costume and textiles. I hope to show how this garment developed in very secular ways and why this was so.

SACRED ASPECTS OF KESA

The etymology of the word *kesa* reveals something of the religious significance of the garment and of the early history of Buddhism. Buddhism originated in India during the 6th century B.C., but did not spread to China

until the 1st century A.D. It was probably at that time that the first accounts of the life of Buddha were translated into Chinese. The story is based on the life of a prince named Siddhartha who abandoned his world of luxury to lead a spiritual life. After several years of adversity, he achieved Buddhahood, or Enlightenment. When versions of this story were rendered in Chinese, terms in the original Sanscrit and Pali languages that had no Chinese equivalents were written using Chinese characters whose sounds duplicated the sounds of the Indian terms.

Accounts of the life of Buddha differ on a number of points, including the type of garment for which he exchanged his princely robes after escaping from the palace. Tattered rags of a beggar are sometimes mentioned, or the garb of a forest sage, or the *kasāya*, colored robe of a hunter. The word *kasāya* was transliterated into Chinese as *chia' sha*, which became the name for the garment itself.⁶ When the Japanese came into contact with Buddhism via the Koreans and the Chinese in the 6th century, they also borrowed the Chinese writing system, since none existed in Japan at that time. Therefore, *kasāya* /*chia' sha* was written using the Chinese characters but pronounced *kesa* by the Japanese.

Kasāya has several meanings, including impure, infected, and muddy. This relates it in concept with *pāmsūla*, another Sanscrit term associated with *kesa*. *Pāmsūla* is discarded cloth. In Buddha's time it is thought that the lay population preferred to wear white clothing.⁷ Cloth that became unpleasantly soiled or stained was thrown away. Those who led ascetic lives collected this discarded cloth to use for their garments. Followers of Buddha were encouraged to do the same, demonstrating their abandonment of secular life. The wearing of *kesa* was an outward sign of the separateness of the monkhood from the laity.

The role of *kesa* in the practice of Buddhism was also of great significance, as it still is today. Monks were given *kesa* at ordination, and this was among the few objects that they were permitted to possess. Special prayers and rituals accompanied the making, unfolding, wearing, washing, and repairing of *kesa*. It was passed down from master to disciple and revered as a symbol of the Buddhist teachings. Also, the symbolism of its format was of importance. These aspects of *kesa* all merit further exposition but are beyond the scope of the present article.

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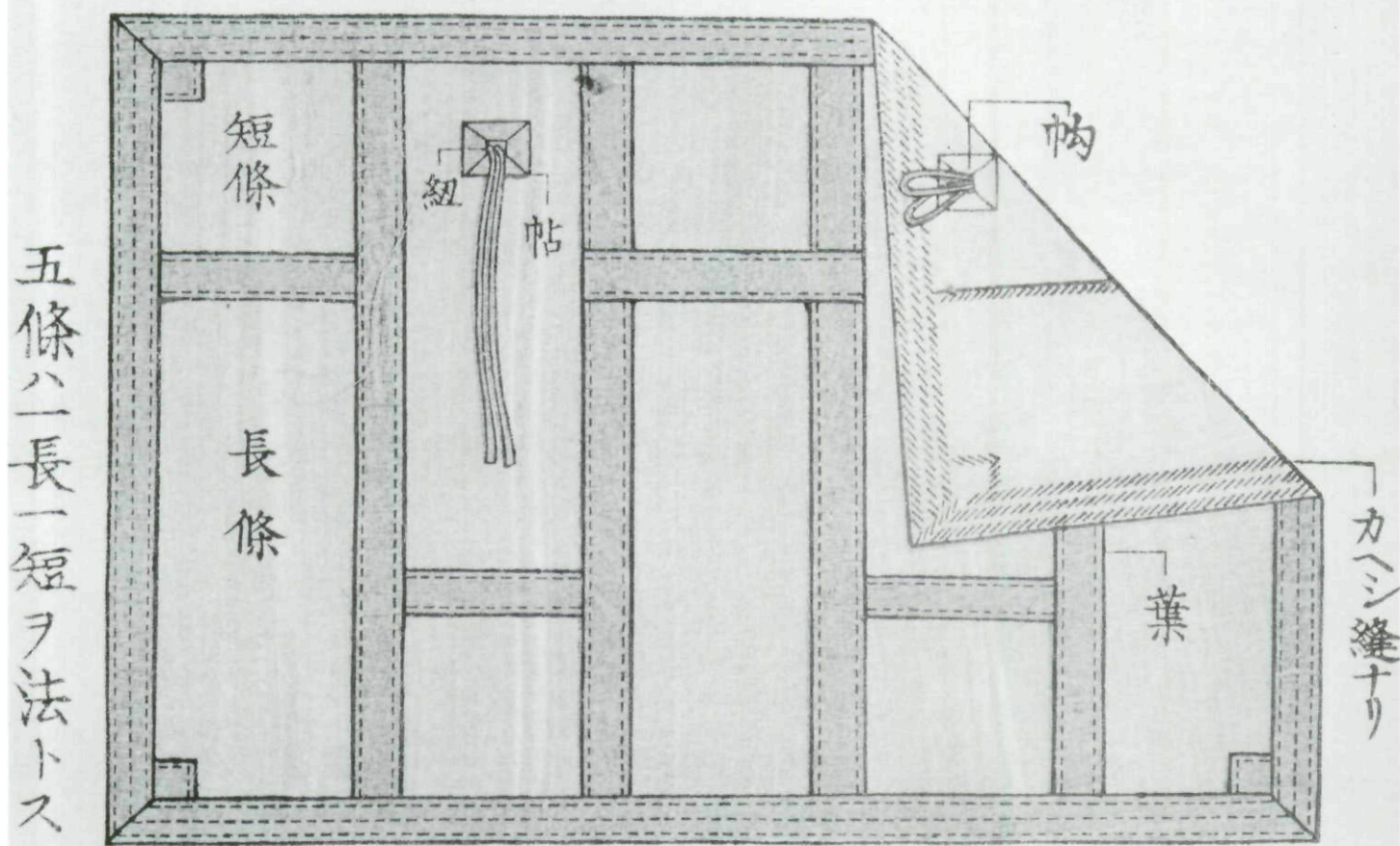


Fig. 1 Drawing of a five column *kesa* reproduced from a late Edo period woodblock-printed manual on *kesa*. The upper right corner is folded forward, exposing the lining. Private collection.

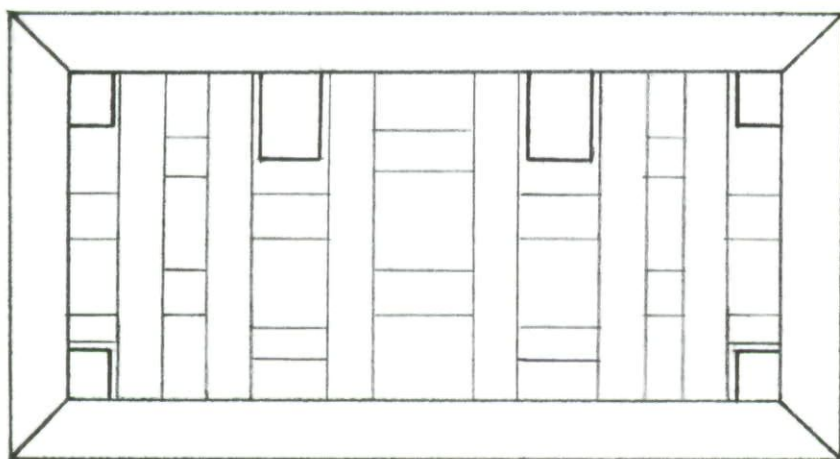


Fig. 2 Drawing of a seven column *kesa*. Based on a drawing by David Palmer in *Japanese Textiles from the Marjorie and Robert Graff Collection*, The Newark Museum, 1978.

TYPES OF KESA

For the sake of clarity, the different kinds of *kesa* and their uses should be mentioned before proceeding to a discussion of their history. Basically, there are three types of *kesa*, the five column, the seven column, and the nine to twenty-five column *kesa*.⁸ The five column *kesa* is composed of one short and one long piece of cloth in each column (Fig. 1). The columns are defined by strips of cloth placed vertically and are divided into the long and short pieces by horizontal strips of cloth. A border surrounds the columns. Squares of cloth are often added at the four corners inside the border, and two larger squares sometimes flank the central column (Fig. 2).

The columns of the seven column *kesa* are composed of two long and one short piece of

cloth (Fig. 2). The third type of *kesa* has 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, or 25 columns, depending on the rank of the wearer. Each column consists of two, three, or four long pieces with one short piece. The number of long pieces increases with the number of columns. A narrow stole, known as an *ōhi*, sometimes serves as a companion piece to the seven column *kesa*. There is also an abbreviated five column *kesa* with halter-like straps called a *kara* or *rakusu*.

Generally speaking, the five column *kesa* is worn by monks within the monastery on a regular basis. For gatherings at the monastery, the seven column *kesa* is worn; while outside the monastery amongst the lay populace, the nine to twenty-five column *kesa* is used.

The most common manner of wearing the *kesa* is diagonally, over the left shoulder and under the right armpit (see Figs. 9, 10, 12). Variations in the format and in the manner of wearing *kesa* have existed amongst the many sects of Buddhism almost since the beginning of the religion.

HISTORY OF KESA — PART I

A three part chronology can be established for extant *kesa*. The first part, beginning in 552, the accepted date for the formal introduction of Buddhism into Japan, extends through the Asuka, Nara, and Heian periods, ending in 1185. The second part includes the Kamakura, Nambokuchō, and Muromachi periods, with an end date of 1573, and the final part consists of the Momoyama and Edo periods, lasting until 1868,⁹ but can be extended to the present day, because *kesa* is still a living part of Buddhism.

The oldest *kesa* in Japan are probably the three pieces that were once treasures of the Hōryū-ji (*ji* means temple) in Nara. They were part of a group of objects given to the then Imperial Government of Japan late in the 19th century. One *kesa* which was recently restored belonged to Buddha himself, according to temple legend. Another *kesa* was supposedly used by Bodhidharma, an Indian monk who was said to have arrived in China in the year 519 and introduced the teachings of Zen Buddhism. The third *kesa* might have belonged to Prince Shōtoku (571–622), who is revered as the founder of Japanese Buddhism. This example is made of small scraps of cloth and called a *funzō-e*, the Japanese name for clothing made of *pāmsūla*. It is not unlike the *kesa* pictured on Shōtoku in a 13th

century painting still in the Hōryū-ji's collection.¹⁰

The provenance of these three *kesa* is questionable, just as the attested provenance of many religious relics in Western churches is doubtful.¹¹ Attributing *kesa* to the most important figures in Buddhist history was undoubtedly a way of legitimizing the Japanese forms of Buddhism.

The earliest documented *kesa* are housed in the Shōsō-in (*in* means sub-temple or a building on a temple's grounds), the famous wooden repository that is part of the Todai-ji compound. The personal effects of Emperor Shōmu (701–756) were placed there shortly after his death and listed in two documents, the *Kenmotsu-chō* and the *Kokka Chimpō-chō*. Shōmu was a devout Buddhist who abdicated in 749 and became a monk. He left behind nine *kesa*, one of nine columns and eight of seven columns.

Shōmu dispatched monks to China for the purpose of studying Buddhism and learning rules for monastic discipline (*Vinaya* in Sanscrit). It is quite possible that all of these *kesa* were brought back from China. In fact, it is known that one *kesa* in the Shōsō-in belonged to Kangōchi Sanzō (Vajrabodhi in Sanscrit), an Indian monk who arrived in China in 719.

Four other *kesa* are kept in another part of the Shōsō-in, called the south section. Items in this section were deposited well after Shōmu's death. Three of these four *kesa* are composed of twenty-five columns, and the other has seventeen columns.

The types of fabric found in the documented Shōsō-in *kesa* are known by several different names.¹² The fiber content is primarily silk. *Shino* is the kind of fabric most often used for the columns. The term refers to a stitching process wherein small, irregularly shaped pieces of cloth are overlapped and joined together. The columns of Shōtoku's *kesa* were made in this manner.

Two terms are used to describe the visual effect of this process. One is *juhishoku*, which translates as tree bark color, and the other is *tōyama*, which means mountains in the distance. These terms are poetic, but also appropriately descriptive.

The *shino* fabric is in keeping with the *pāmsūla* concept, although it cannot be determined whether the scraps used were actually discarded material. However, woven cloth is also found in the Shōsō-in *kesa*. One type is known as *shokusei*, and is used for the columns

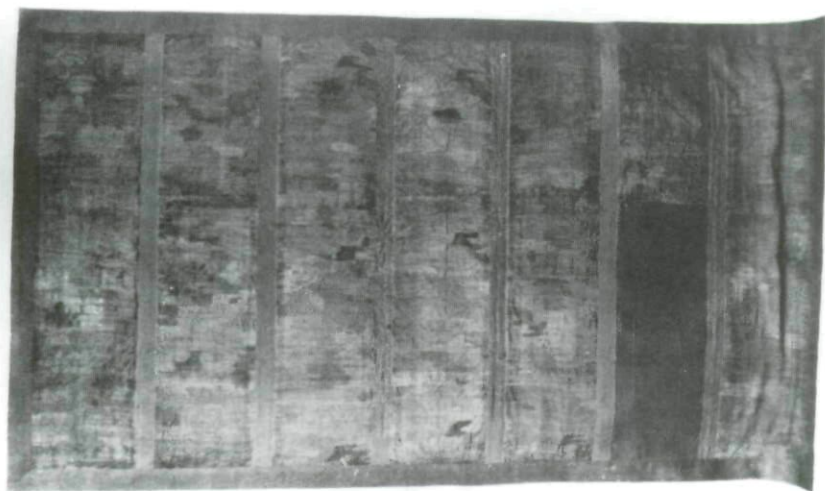


Fig. 3 Seven column *kesa*, silk, 139 cm × 245.5 cm. Collection of Shōsō-in, Nara, Japan. Reproduced from volume 1 of *Tōyō Shukō*, Tokyo, 1923.

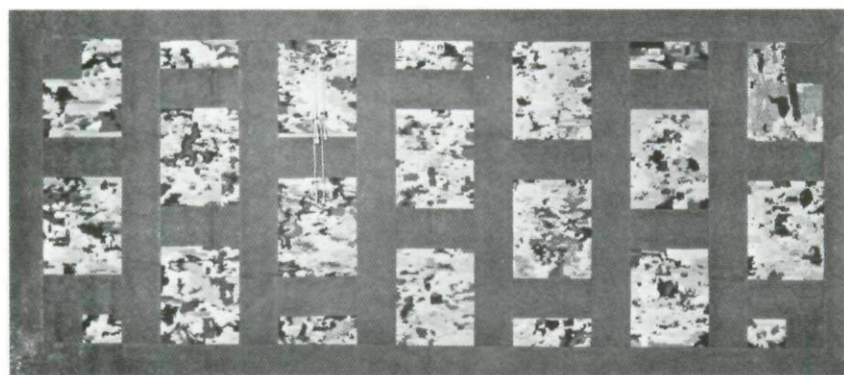


Fig. 4 Seven column *kesa* worn by Kōbō-daishi, silk, 112.7 cm × 266 cm. Collection of Tō-ji, properly known as Kyōōgokoku-ji, Kyoto, Japan. Reproduced from *Hōe Shi*, by Gafū Izutsu, Yūzan kaku, Tokyo, 1978, p. 19.

of a seven column *kesa* (Fig. 3). It is a type of tapestry weave that alternates continuous wefts with discontinuous wefts. This weave can produce a visual effect similar to the patchwork look of *shino*.¹³

Another seven column *kesa* has columns made of *tsumugi*, which can be defined as a type of pongee. It is brown in color, as opposed to the *shokusei kesa*, which is polychrome. A brown colored *ra kesa* of seven columns has survived with its original box and cloth wrapper. *Ra* is a type of gauze.

The borders and dividing strips of the Shōsō-in *kesa* are mostly replacements for the original fabrics. The fabric most often used for these parts is *aya*. *Aya* is a very general textile term which at that time usually referred to a monochromatic figured silk. A diamond patterned *aya* border is found on the *shokusei kesa*. Another fabric used for these parts is *ashiginu*, which is a coarse silk cloth with warps and wefts of varying thicknesses.

A *kesa* brought back from China in 805 is preserved in the Enryaku-ji near Kyoto. It belonged to the famous monk, Saichō, known posthumously as Dengyō-daishi (*daishi* means great Buddhist teacher), founder of the Tendai sect. This *kesa* has seven columns of *shino* and borders and dividing strips of *asa*, a generic term for grass bast fibers such as ramie and hemp.

Kūkai, known posthumously as Kōbō-daishi, brought back a *kesa* named the "*kenda*" *kokushi kesa* (Fig. 4). He founded the Shingon sect upon his return from China in 806. *Kokushi* is another type of tapestry weave, and is used for the columns of this *kesa*. It also simulates the look of *shino* (Fig. 5). The border and dividing strips are *aya* patterned with Buddhist symbols known as *jūji kongō* and *rinbō* (*karmavajra* and *cakra* in Sanscrit). This *aya* is a replacement for the original border and dividing strips, and was put on in 1182. An *ōhi* that Kūkai brought back also survives.

Undoubtedly, *kesa* were made in Japan during this early period, even though all of the early surviving examples probably came from China. One literary reference that provides evidence of Japanese-made *kesa* was written by Ennin, a Japanese monk in China from 838 to 847. He relates that before embarking, the Japanese ambassador to China was given a *kesa* from the Enryaku-ji to present to its head monastery in China.

The use of fabrics other than *shino* in *kesa* should not necessarily be considered contrary to the original Buddhist laws. Buddha and his disciples must have anticipated the growth of Buddhism and its monastic system, because the *Vinaya* does allow for gifts of cloth from the lay population to be used for the making of *kesa*. The early Buddhists probably realized the impracticality of using *pāmsūla*, although they did consider it desirable, according to the *Vinaya*. How the use of *shokusei* and *kokushi* would have been viewed is less certain. These fabrics might have been considered inappropriate, because they are whole, but give the appearance of being pieced.

The use of silk might also suggest a lapse of discipline amongst the monkhood, but silk, along with certain other fibers, was permitted in the *Vinaya*. However, it seems that in T'ang Dynasty China, the use of silk became extravagant. Ennin mentions the need for 116 feet of silk to make the three types of *kesa*, and the difficulty in finding the funds for this amount of silk.

Apart from the laxity allowed in the making

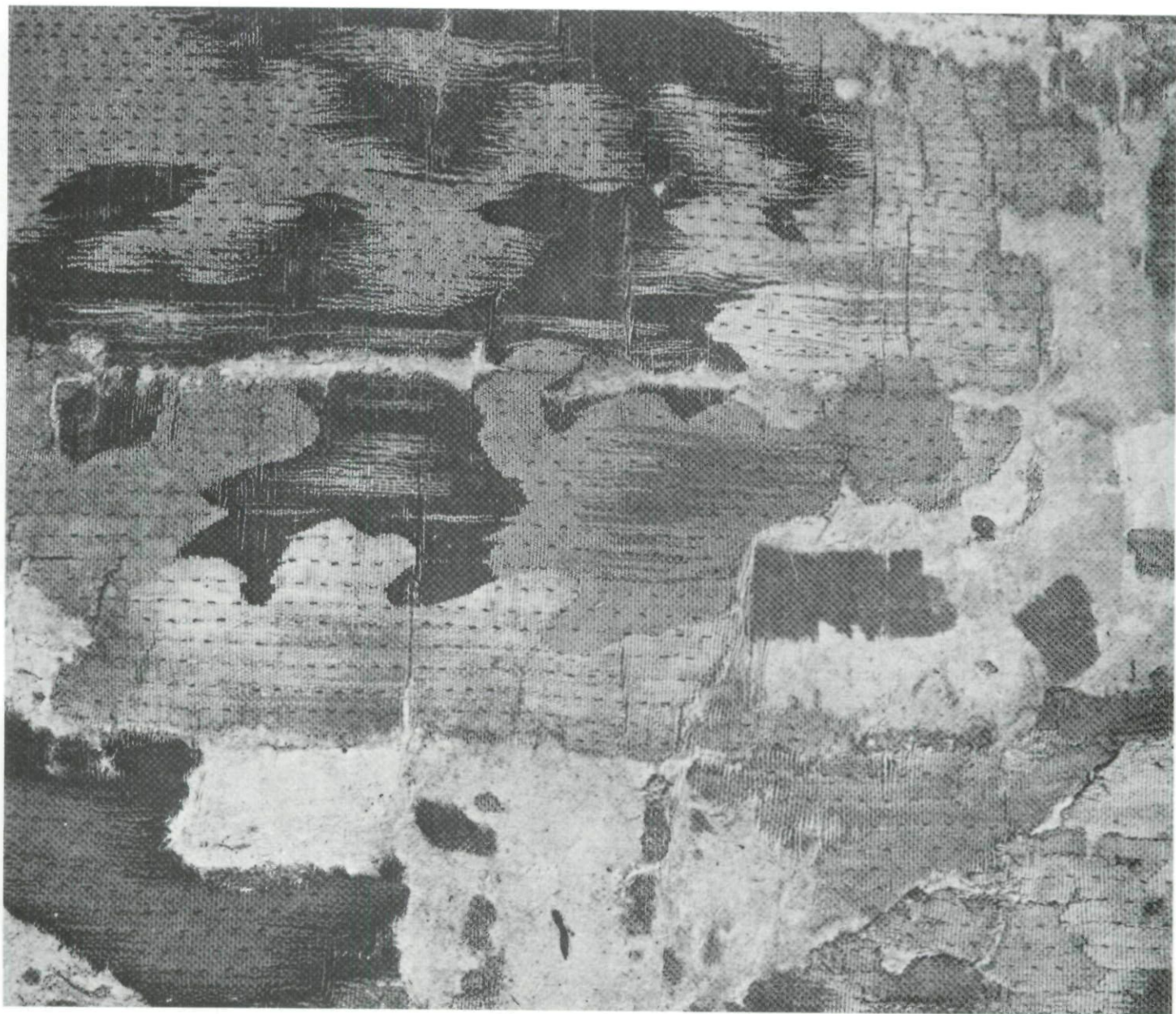


Fig. 5 Detail of Figure 4 showing *kokushi*. Reproduced from *Nihon no Bijutsu*, #12, Shibun-do, Tokyo, 1967, p. 94.

of *kesa* as provided in the *Vinaya*, further allowances stemmed from the change that Buddhism underwent in China. The form of Buddhism that came to hold sway in China was the more liberal Mahayana Buddhism, as opposed to the more orthodox Theravada Buddhism, which rooted itself in South and Southeast Asia. Certain Chinese customs became a part of Chinese Buddhism. For example, the stipulation that the third type of *kesa* could have from 9 to 25 columns representing 9 different ranks was a Chinese innovation probably based on an old Han Dynasty system of rank known as *chiu p'in* (meaning 9 grades). Also, because of the colder climate of China, monks did not abide by the rule that the three

kesa could be the only clothing allowed to them.

The passage of time further cemented the changes introduced to Buddhism by the Chinese. It must be remembered that Buddhism had already existed in China for five centuries by the time Japan learned of the religion. China continued to be the major source of stimulus for Japanese Buddhism and *kesa*, as will be shown in the next section.

HISTORY OF KESA — PART II

With the fall of the T'ang Dynasty early in the

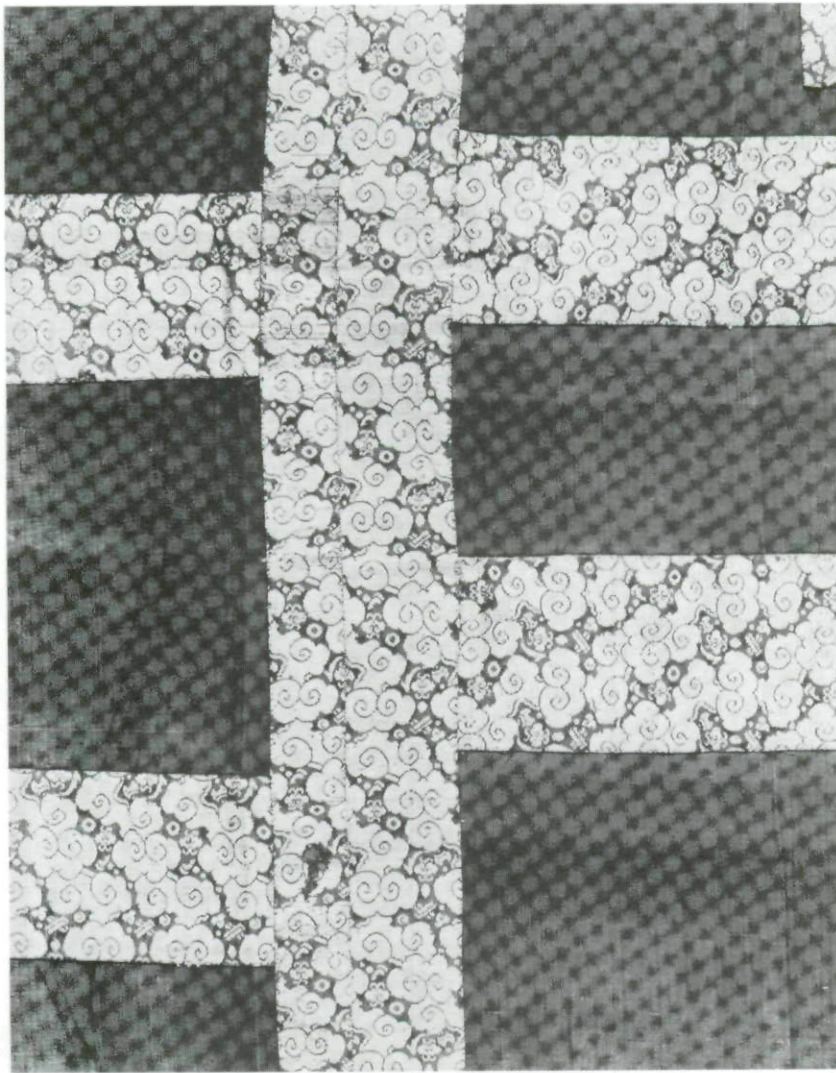


Fig. 6 Detail showing parts of dividing strips and columns of a nine column *kesa*, silk and *kinran*, worn by Kūkoku Myōō (1328–1407). Collection of Jisei-in, Kyoto, Japan. Reproduced from *Nihon no Bijutsu*, #90, 1974, pl. 57.

10th Century, contact with China lessened considerably. Japan was plagued by instability throughout much of the latter part of the Heian period (794–1185) due to the declining control of the imperial court. Few textiles or costumes and virtually no *kesa* have survived from the middle and late parts of that period. The establishment of the *bakufu* (military government) in 1185 at Kamakura brought about political stability and renewed contacts with China.

Early in the Kamakura period (1185–1333) Japanese Buddhism was revitalized by the importation of new forms of Buddhism from China as embodied by the Jōdo, Zen, and Shin sects. As in earlier times, *kesa* were brought over, symbolic of the new teachings. The sur-



Fig. 7 Detail showing parts of a column and dividing strips of a nine column *kesa*, silk and *kinran*, worn by Fusen Hojo (died 1381). Collection of Sanshū-in, Kyoto, Japan. Reproduced from *Nihon no Bijutsu*, #90, 1974, pl. 75.

viving *kesa* of the Kamakura, Nambokuchō (1333–1392), and Muromachi (1392–1573) periods are also primarily of Chinese origin. They exhibit an expanded repertory of weave structures, materials, and designs relative to the *kesa* of earlier periods.

Of the many *kesa* that have survived from these periods, one of the most elaborate is a nine column example in the Chion-in, located in Kyoto.¹⁴ It is Chinese in origin, and dates to the early part of the Kamakura period. Most of its surface is covered with embroidery that depicts Buddhist deities and symbols, and a variety of flowers, plants, and animals. However, it was the woven textiles used in *kesa*, rather than embroidery, that was to have the greatest influence on Japanese textiles.

Kinran was one of the textiles most frequently used in *kesa* of these periods. It is named for the flat, thin strips of paper covered with gold foil which are woven into the fabric. When silver is used, it is termed *ginran*. The dividing strips shown in Figures 6 and 7 are of *kinran*.

Another type of textile which makes use of gold foil is *inkin*. The border, dividing strip, and corner square seen in Figure 8 are *inkin*, which refers to cloth patterned by the application of gold foil. The usual procedure involves the spreading of an adhesive onto cloth

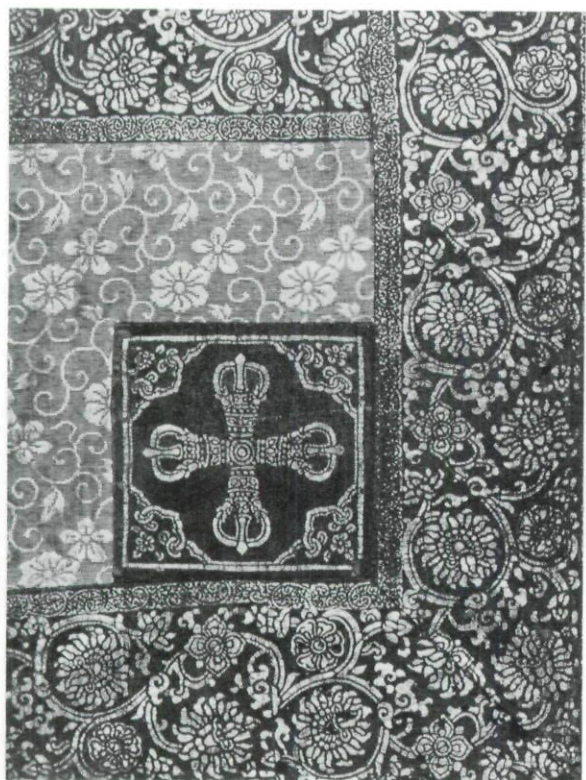


Fig. 8 Detail showing a corner square and parts of the border, column, and dividing strip of a nine column *kesa*, silk and *inkin*, said to have been worn by the Chinese monk Seisetsu Shōchō, who came to Japan in 1327. Collection of Chōshō-in, Kyoto, Japan. Reproduced from *Nihon no Bijutsu*, #90, 1974, pl. 132.

through a stencil cut with the desired design. The foil is then placed on top of the adhesive and rubbed. Only areas of the foil in contact with the adhesive remain. A related technique known as *kirikane* was used for decorating sculpture and painting. The designs of the *kesa* in Figures 9 and 10 were made by this process.

The *inkin* of Figure 8 uses *ra* as the ground fabric. Another kind of gauze, called *sha*, was used for the columns in that same *kesa*. *Donsu* is a kind of damask. It appears with the *kinran* in Figure 6.

As they came to be used in Japan, these different kinds of textiles were given additional names. They were highly prized because nothing comparable could be produced in Japan at that time. The additionally named textiles were known by the general term *meibutsu gire*, which can be translated as "named cloth." The names were taken from a temple which imported the textile, or a certain design on the textile, or a famous person who favored it. Examples named after temples include Nanzen-ji *kinran*, Daitoku-ji *kinran*, and

Kodai-ji *kinran*, all representing *kinran* of various designs that were originally associated with those particular temples.

Meibutsu gire were important in tea ceremony, as they still are. In order to be considered proficient, a practitioner had to correctly identify *meibutsu gire*, and to facilitate the learning of that, albums were assembled with actual textile fragments labelled with their proper names (Fig. 11).

The repertory of designs found in *kesa* of these periods also expanded greatly. One of the most popular designs was a floral vine scroll termed *karakusa* (literally "Chinese plant"). A floral pattern known as *hōsōge*, long associated with Buddhist art, was sometimes used on *kesa*. A *hōsōge karakusa* design can be seen in the border and dividing strip of Figure 8. The peony, a highly auspicious flower, was also popular in *karakusa* designs, such as appear in Figure 7. Another auspicious flower, the plum blossom, can be seen on the *donsu* in Figure 7. Clouds and treasure symbols decorate Figure 6. The *sha* in Figure 8 features stylized flowers known as *karahana* (literally "Chinese flower") in a *karakusa* arrangement. Other often used designs included dragons and phoenixes (the latter more properly called by the Japanese name, *Hō-ō*).

Kesa patterns also appear on Buddhist sculpture and painting. The border and dividing strips of *kesa* worn by Jizō (Fig. 9) have a leaf *karakusa* design (Fig. 10). A peony *karakusa* design can be seen in the *kesa* border and dividing strips of the monk portrait (Fig. 12).

The *kesa* brought from China during these periods served as a vehicle for the introduction of new textile technology and designs. Their textiles served as models for weavers and designers in Japan. More research is necessary before it can be determined what Japanese-made *kesa* of those times were like.

It is evident that ideas as to what a *kesa* could be made of and what it could look like broadened during these periods. The *shino kesa* gave way to *kesa* made of intricately woven fabrics, often incorporating precious metals such as gold and silver. Designs of a Buddhist nature persisted, but were augmented by non-Buddhist Chinese designs, including the dragon, *karahana*, peony, etc.

China continued to be the model for Buddhist practices. Many monks travelled between the two countries during these periods. That the more worldly directions in *kesa* were accepted in Japan was not surprising. The

Fig. 9 Cypress wood sculpture of Jizō (Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha in Sanscrit), polychromy and *kirikane*, made between 1223 and 1226. Asia Society, New York City: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.202.



ranks of the monkhood were sometimes composed of men and women who retired from elite secular positions to become monks. Emperor Shōmu had established that as a custom as early as the 8th century. Also, great wealth and power were concentrated in the temples and monasteries at various times throughout Japan's history, occasionally challenging the authority of the central government. In one instance a class of monks known as *sōhei* (soldier monks) became so powerful that they helped bring about the demise of the Fujiwara oligarchy at the end of the Heian period.

The fact that Japan is so remote from India, the source of Buddhism, and came to the religion at a relatively late date, can be seen as another reason for the secular turns that Buddhism took in Japan. Dōgen, a monk of the Zen sect who studied Buddhism in China from 1223 to 1227, commented, "How regrettable it is that we were born in a corner of the world located far from India and China, and moreover, in the age of degenerate Buddhism!"¹⁵

HISTORY OF KESA — PART III

This section includes the short lived Momoyama period (1573–1615) and the Edo period (1615–1868). During the latter part of the Muromachi period and throughout the Momoyama period, warring factions were struggling for power in Japan. The Tokugawa family emerged supreme, establishing a new capital at Edo (modern day Tokyo). It was decided that Japan should be isolated from the rest of the world. Foreigners were expelled, and the Japanese were not permitted to travel abroad.

This, among other factors, had a very positive effect on Japanese textiles. The great flowering of Japanese textile art that was taking place after centuries of foreign influence was allowed to continue unabated because of the isolation.

The importation of Chinese *kesa* seems to have ended. Extant Chinese and Japanese *kesa* are quite different, perhaps an indication that the Japanese did not have or wish to use Chinese *kesa* as models for their own. Native developments can be seen in Japanese *kesa* of these periods. For example, secular painting and costume fashion became an influence, and textile production methods were devised to create special decorative effects in *kesa*.

A very obvious convergence of sacred and secular costume resulted from the use of gar-



Fig. 10 Detail of Figure 9 showing *karakusa* patterned border and dividing strips and columns with a swastika fret design. Photograph by O.E. Nelson.

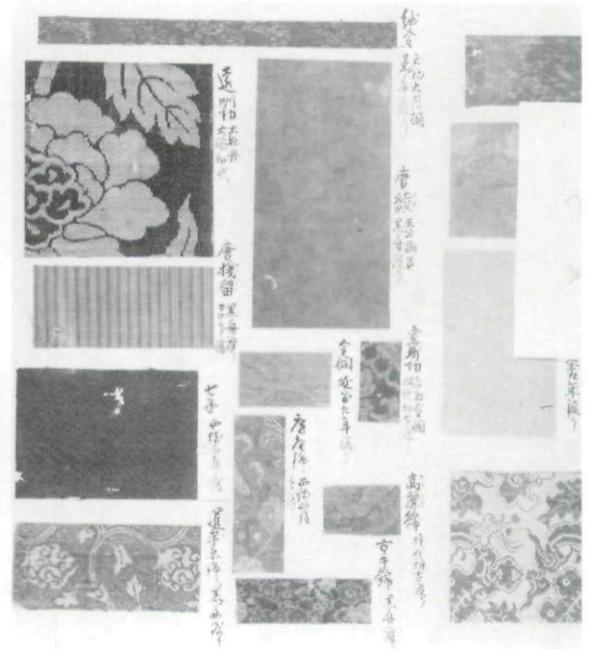
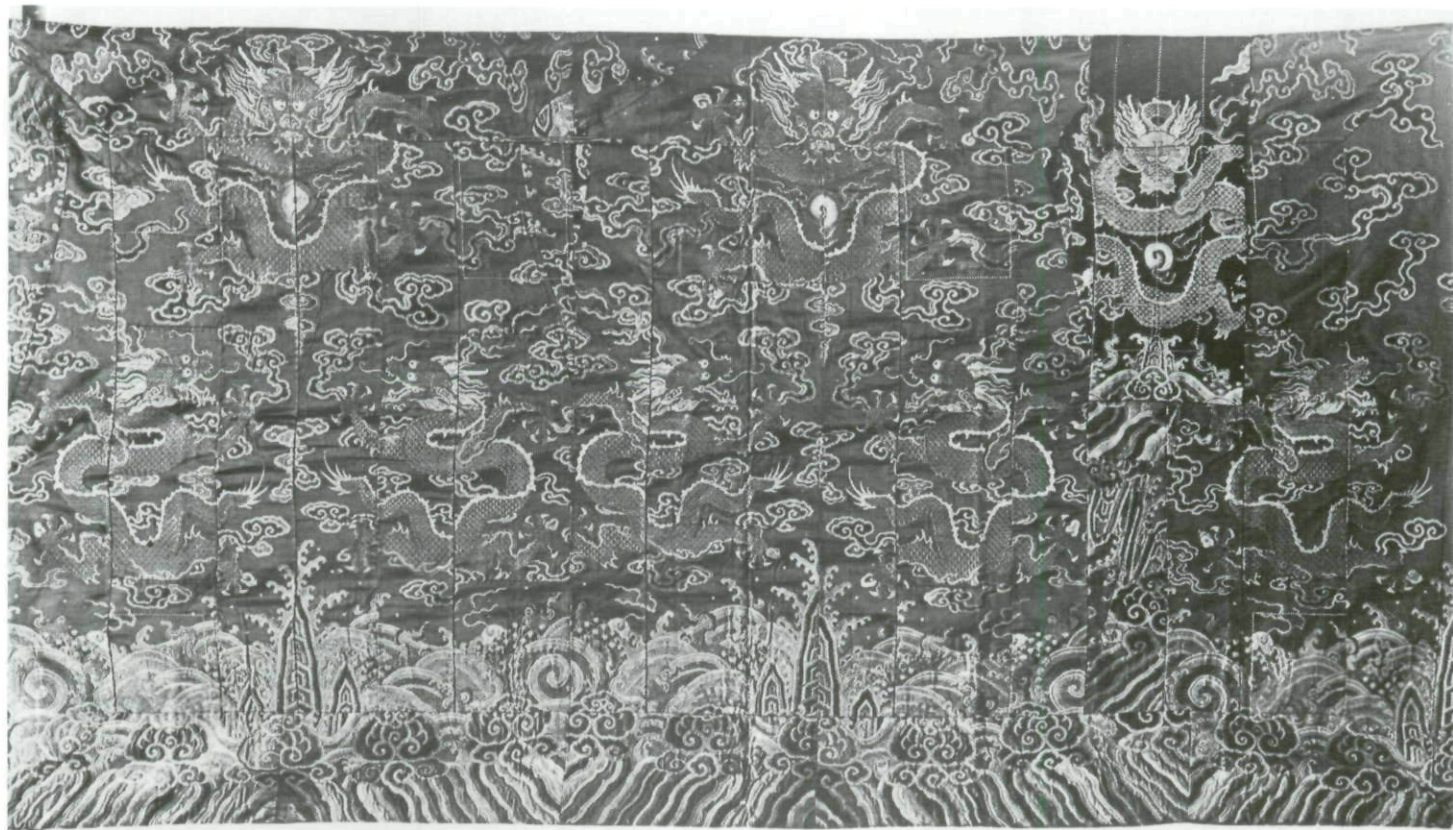


Fig. 11 Page from a *meibutsu gire* album. Private collection.



Fig. 12 Portrait of Daitō Kokushi (1282–1337), painting on silk. Collection of Daitoku-ji, Kyoto, Japan. Reproduced from *History of Buddhist Art in Japan*, International Buddhist Society, Tokyo, 1940, pl. 45.



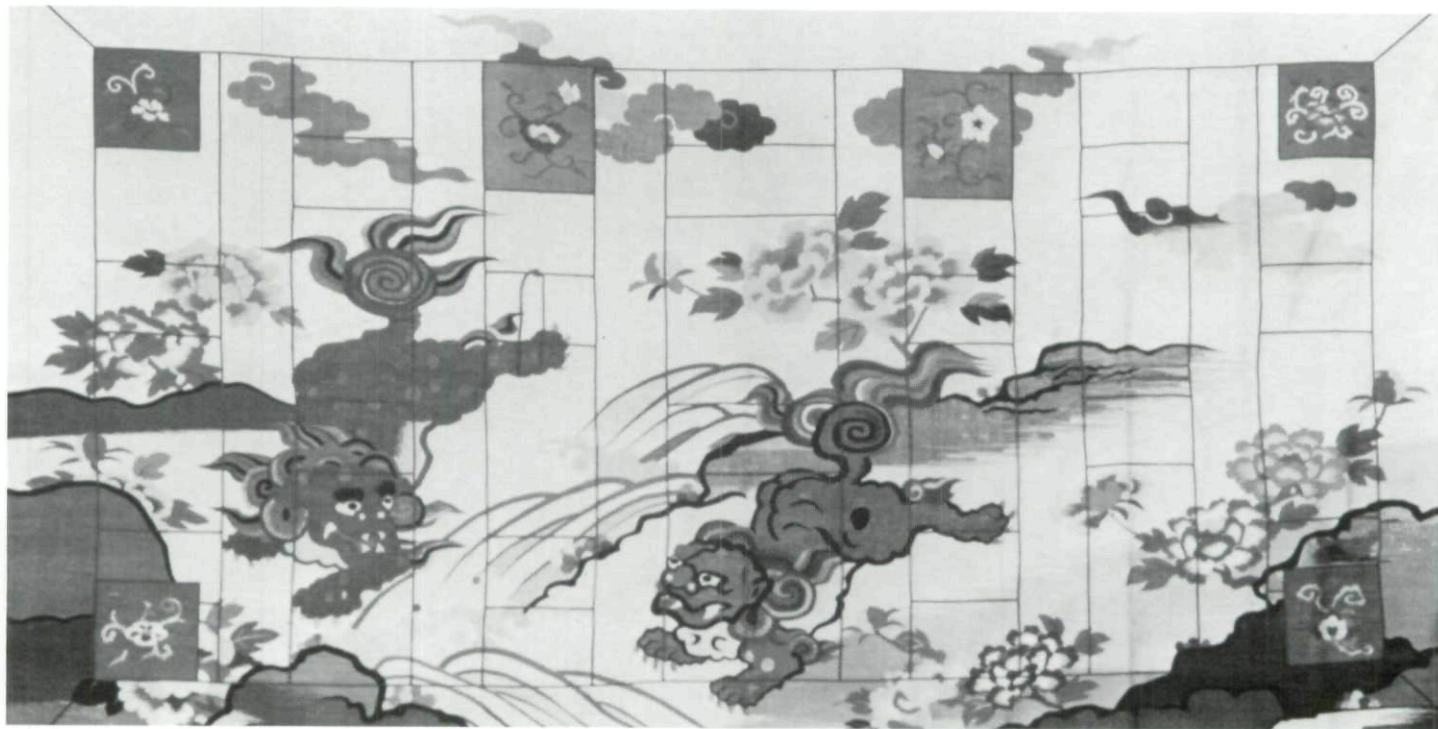


Fig. 13 (left, top) Five column *kesa* made from a *kosode*, silk and *kinran*, 42½"×66½", 18th century. Collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Edward G. Kennedy, 1932, 32.65.25.

ments donated by the lay populace for the making of *kesa*.¹⁶ In some instances very elaborate kimono were disassembled and cut and sewn, or folded and sewn, into the proper *kesa* format. Notable examples of such pieces include the *kosode* (a small sleeved kimono) that belonged to the wife of Hada, a Momoyama period *daimyō* (lord). It was made into a nine column *kesa*.¹⁷ The fabric is a type known as *tsugigahana*, incorporating resist dyeing, embroidery, and gilding. Two other published *kesa* were made from *kosode* material patterned by the complicated resist dyeing and painting processes known as *Yuzen* and *Kaga*.¹⁸ A five column *kesa* of *chirimen* (a kind of crepe) with resist dyed and embroidered designs was undoubtedly made from a *kosode* (Fig. 13). Fabric from plainer kimono was sometimes used for the linings of *kesa*.¹⁹

Fig. 14 (left, bottom) Seven column *kesa* made from a Chinese dragon robe, silk and metallic threads, 42"×78", catalogued by Shojiro Nomura, the seller, in *An Historical Sketch of Nishiki and Kinran Brocades*, Boston, 1914, as Tai-Ming Wangli period (1573–1619), but more likely 18th century or later. Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase, Joseph Pulitzer bequest, 1919, 19.93.50.

Fig. 15 Seven column *kesa*, silk 44"×81", 19th century. Private collection.

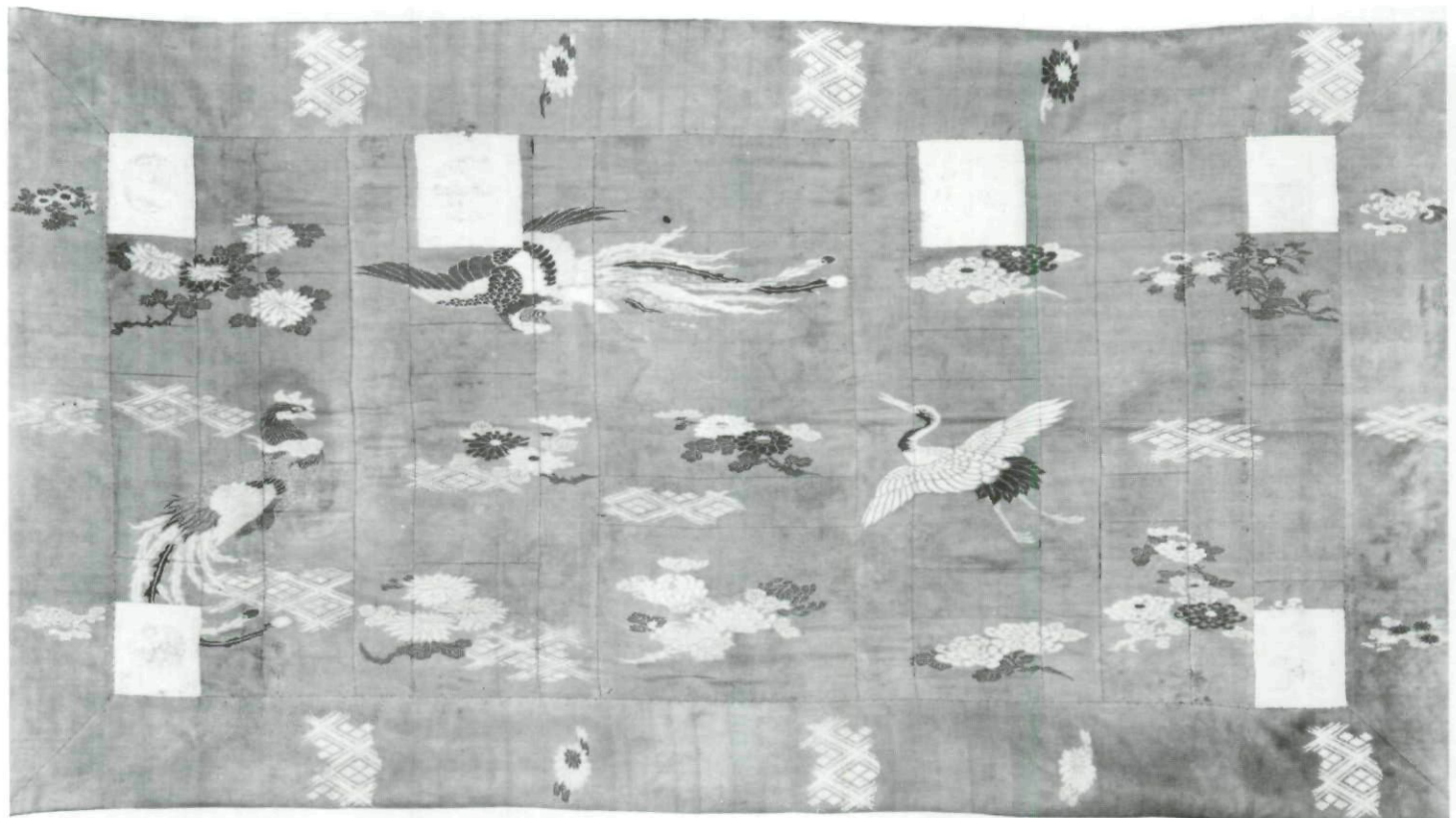
Several *kesa* made from Chinese dragon robes are known. Material woven for a dragon robe would have been greatly prized because only those of the highest ranks could wear them in China. Furthermore, as with the rest of the world, trade with China was minimal. An example of such a *kesa* depicts four-clawed dragons on a brown ground with white lines of stitching added to create an illusion of the existence of the traditional four corner squares and two inner ones flanking the central column (Fig. 14).

Another group of *kesa* woven during these periods depicts, complete tableaux, as would a painting. Many were made of *tsuzure* panels stitched together (usually three in number with a loom width of approximately two and a half feet each). Figure 15 is one such example, which is quite similar in subject matter to a painting by Eitoku Kanō, one of the greatest painters of the Momoyama period (Fig. 16). Because the panels of these pictorial *kesa* were made whole, rather than pieced, thread wrapped with *kinran* and twisted into cords was sewn over them to simulate the pieced column format. These cords appear as lines in Figure 15. In rare instances lines were drawn on the fabric itself, or integrated into the weaving of the fabric.



Fig. 16 (above) Screen painting by Eitoku Kanō, Momoyama period. Imperial Collection. Reproduced from *Genshoku Nihon no Bijutsu* (Japanese Art Illustrated in Color), volume 14, Shōgakukan, Tokyo, 1969, p. 206.

Fig. 17 (below) Seven column *kesa*, silk and *kinran*, 45" × 82", late 18th/early 19th century. Private collection. [Photograph by Jean Jacques Magis.]



A more complicated method used for creating a pictorial scene while adhering to the pieced format involved the weaving of each piece of the *kesa* separately. The weaving was painstakingly planned in order that all of the pieces, when sewn together, would create the impression of an unbroken whole. Figure 17 presents such an example, which is composed of many individually woven pieces. In the detail, parts of the crane appear on three different pieces of the *kesa*, but they all match up exactly at the seams (Fig. 18). A published *kesa* constructed in this fashion has designs including musical instruments, theatrical masks, and flowers.²⁰

The *kesa* thus far described are a small percentage of the extant *kesa* of these periods, but they do represent, for the first time, a truly Japanese-style *kesa*. Their tour de force weaving, intimate connection with secular costume, and resemblance to secular painting are indications of the extreme point to which *kesa* were taken in their secularization.

The great majority of *kesa* from these periods were based on *meibutsu gire*, both in designs and in weave structures, and were pieced in the conventional manner. These examples perpetuated the direction established by the Chinese in the preceding periods. Other *kesa* exhibit designs that are more Japanese in style. Overall, the range of designs and weaves found in extant *kesa* of these periods is immense. It is fortunate that so many have been preserved in the West.

By comparison, China *kesa* of corresponding dates are distinctly different. Unfortunately, very few have survived.²¹ Based on these examples, they were primarily embroidered or *k-o'ssu* (a type of tapestry weave), had designs drawn from mostly Buddhist and Taoist sources, and seem to have been made in sets (as many as five identical examples of one design alone are extant).

That the final stage in the development of *kesa* seems so far from the intentions of the early Buddhists is not so surprising. A parallel can easily be seen with the rich ecclesiastical vestments of the Catholic Church. The tendency towards extravagant display is perhaps inevitable in organized religion. However, the apparent contradiction of sumptuous silks representing rags of renunciation was justifiable to a monk such as Dōgen, who said, "A *kesa* . . . whether ragged or beautiful . . . is in accordance with the Law, having correctly transmitted the essence of all the Buddhas."²²



Fig. 18 Detail of Figure 17.

NOTES

1. The lengthiest text on *kesa* by a non-Asian written by Charles Arsène Henry, a former French Ambassador to Japan. It appeared in *Tapisseries et Soieries Japonaises*, which was volume 12, #1, in *Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise*, Paris, 1941. Numerous *kesa* are illustrated, but none earlier than the 16th century. Otherwise, *kesa* have been discussed briefly in several books and catalogues on Far Eastern costume and textiles and on Buddhism.

2. See volumes 49 and 50 of *Dai Nihon Bukkyō Zensho* (Complete Collection of Japanese Buddhism), edited by Bussho Kankō-kai, Tokyo, 1913-22, and *Kesa no Kenkyū* (*Kesa Studies*) by Keichū Kyuma, 1967. Many other Buddhist dictionaries and manuals serve as 'how to' guides for Buddhist monks on the making and using of *kesa*.

3. He has written *Kesa Shi* (History of *Kesa*) and *Hōe Shi* (History of Buddhist Monk Costume), both published in Tokyo, 1978, (date of the most recent editions). These volumes have lengthy texts and are profusely illustrated.

4. Notable exceptions are found in the series *Sacred Books of the East* and *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*. In the former's volumes 13, 17, and 20, translated by T.W. Rhys David and Hermann Oldenberg, 1881-85; and the latter's volumes 10, 11, 13, 14, and 20 translated by Isaline B. Horner, 1938-52, are contained translations of the *Suttavibhanga*, *Mahāvagga*, and *Cūlavagga*. Those three works are part of the *Vinaya*, or rules for the monkhood, and all contain rules relating to *kesa*. Also, *Kesa Kudoku* (The Merit of a *Kesa*), written by Dōgen, a 13th century Buddhist monk, was translated by Yūhō Yokoi in *Zen Master Dōgen*, New York, 1976.

5. Museums with as many as 100 *kesa* in their collections include The William Rockhill Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, and Yale University Art Gallery. Other large collections are to be found in The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Freer Gallery of Art, and The Art Institute of Chicago. Most major U.S. and Canadian museums have at least a few *kesa* in their collections. European museums

surveyed so far have less extensive holdings of *kesa*.

6. It is interesting to note that *kivara*, the Sanscrit and Pali term for the garment, was never used by the Chinese or Japanese.

7. This remained a custom for centuries. Yuan Chwang, a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim in India during the 7th century A.D., remarked that as to color of garments amongst the Indian lay population, "a fresh white is esteemed and motley is of no account." *On Yuan Chwang*, by Thomas Watters, London, 1904, p. 148.

8. Known in Sanscrit as *antaravāsaka*, *uttarāsanga*, and *saṅghātī*, respectively. Chinese and Japanese terms are the phonetic equivalents of the above.

9. There is considerable variation in the names and dates of Japanese historical periods. The selection of period names and dates used here may differ from those in other publications.

10. Published as plate 32 in *Hōryū-ji: Temple of the Exalted Law*, Japan Society, New York, 1981.

11. Information on the *kesa* formerly in the Hōryū-ji collection can be found in *Museum*, the art journal edited by the staff of The Tokyo National Museum, #332, November, 1978. The supposed Shōtoku *kesa* has been exhibited at The Tokyo National Museum, but, in general, important *kesa* are rarely exhibited. One other notable recent exception was a Buddhist art exhibition at The Kyoto National Museum in 1981, which included examples dating from the 9th through the 16th century.

12. Japanese costume and textile terminology is as confusing and inconsistent as that of any other culture, and has never been properly explained in the Western literature. The most useful source of information in Japanese is *Genshoku Senshoku Daijiten* (Dyeing and Weaving Dictionary Illustrated in Color), Kyoto, 1978.

13. It is interesting to note that the general term for tapestry weave in Japanese is *tsuzure ori*, which translates literally as "patches weave."

14. Gafū Izutsu, *Kesa Shi*, pl. 76.

15. Dōgen, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

16. It is a commonly held belief that most *kesa* were made from secular garments. However, secular clothing, with the exception of theater costume, was made of much lighter weight and flimsier fabric than is usually found in *kesa*. *Kinran* was the most common *kesa* fabric of these periods, and is a stiffer fabric because of the gilt paper woven through it.

17. Toshiko Itō, *Tsujigahana: The Flower of Japanese Textile Art*, translated by Monica Bethe, Tokyo, 1981, pl. 145.

18. Shojiro Nomura, *Yuzen Kenkyū* (Yuzen Studies), Kyoto, 1920, no page numbers.

19. Occasionally inscriptions are found on *kesa* linings which can be useful in dating a *kesa* and providing other pertinent information.

20. Henry, *op. cit.*, pl. 85.

21. The Minneapolis Institute of Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art have several examples of Ch'ing Dynasty (1644–1912) *kesa* in their collections.

22. Dōgen, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

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* As with all nouns in the Japanese language, *kesa* has no plural form. In this article plural endings are not used with Japanese words.

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